

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 37

By Harper

A RESOLUTION to honor and commend the Better Decisions organization for laudable service to the people of Tennessee.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly should salute those citizens who, through their extraordinary efforts, have distinguished themselves as estimable public servants who have dedicated themselves to improving the quality of life for their fellow citizens; and

WHEREAS, founded in 1985, Better Decisions has proven itself a laudable organization, worthy of recognition for its efforts in improving the lives of incarcerated women in Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, the General Assembly finds it exceedingly alarming that women represent the fastest growing prison population nationally and that, in Tennessee, the female prison and jail population increased 10 percent from 2002 to 2003; and

WHEREAS, two-thirds of women in prison have children under the age of eighteen; yet, because of the low number of prison facilities for women, incarcerated women often undergo exceptional hardships due to deprivation of close contact with their children and families; and

WHEREAS, the General Assembly recognizes that to facilitate the success of women leaving the prison system, it is affirmed that a key feature of self-actualization is the existence of community supports and programs designed to promote the well-being of these citizens in need; and

WHEREAS, Better Decisions is an extraordinary organization that promotes thoughtful and conscientious self-education, with both wide scope and universal application for incarcerated women; and

WHEREAS, each year, volunteers give almost 4,000 hours of their time to Better Decisions, thereby contributing immeasurably to the welfare of their communities and the incarcerated women who participate in weekly classes and one-on-one sessions aimed at paving the way for successful transitions from prison back into the community; and

WHEREAS, Better Decisions has evidenced an aptitude for empowering its clients by focusing on improving self-esteem along with decision-making and life-planning skills such that almost 1,000 women incarcerated at the Tennessee Prison for Women have graduated from Better Decisions since 1985; and

WHEREAS, over seven hundred fifty volunteers, ranging from nineteen to eighty-nine years of age, have attended a training weekend and participated in at least one eight-week cycle supporting the praiseworthy efforts of incarcerated women who are committed to improving their lives through better choices; and

WHEREAS, since 1997, Better Decisions has been able to reach more than one hundred teenage girls through collaboration with the Woodland Hills Youth Development Center; the charitable volunteers of Better Decisions have provided extra listening ears, open minds and hearts, patience, and great fortitude in working with this special population of young women; and

WHEREAS, such an important effort by this organization, designed to promote the betterment of the lives of women and families in Tennessee, will continue with great success thanks to the presence of its tireless leaders and steadfast volunteers; and

WHEREAS, this General Assembly finds it appropriate to pause in its deliberations to acknowledge and applaud Better Decisions for twenty years of demonstrated dedication to improving the quality of life for Tennesseans, which renders the organization faithful to the noble precepts of public service that have earned Tennessee recognition as the "Volunteer State"; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we recognize and congratulate the staff and volunteers of Better Decisions upon the organization's twentieth anniversary, salute their ongoing commitment to serving the

neglected societal needs of women leaving the prison system, and extend to them our wishes for every success in their future endeavors.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.